Editorial

Inculturation - Continuity and Change in the African Church

The Christian message makes impact in a milieu wnen it secures adherents from the target society. Whatever may be the levels of adherence, the local culture must in one way or the other be touched. *Gospel* and *Culture* must embrace. The entrance of Christianity into sub-Saharan Africa especially from the nineteenth century radically impacted on all aspects of African life. This is because of the close connection between colonisation of the continent and its christianization. Instability or uncertainty was introduced into the market place, into the political arena, into shrines of divinities and into initiation camps. Consequently, sub-Saharan Africa increasingly lost control of its environment. The control of the environment and the establishment of predictability in human life are crucial to the definition of culture. For, "cultures are environments of artifacts and meanings which are shaped to render the life of the human community. more immune to the uncertainties of natural conditions, human feelings, and historical events" [i]

African Christians, in the post-colonial period, increasingly question the separation of their culture from their faith in Jesus Christ. In this way they re-appropriate their right to be the originators of their own designs and the projectors or creators of those events which lead to their destiny. This is why inculturation has become such a burning issue within the African Church. This is not surprising because Christianity from its origins is a multicultural phenomenon. In Africa, inculturation has become part of the self understanding of the local Church as self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting. It is another way of proclaiming that the Word has effectively pitched Its tent among us. Theologians in Africa are exploring ways and means whereby one may become Christian without being the less African. The entire human and natural resources of Africa are convoked in the response to or reception of the faith. In this dialectics of

acceptance and rejection, imperative in any encounter between Gospel and Culture, faith becomes culture. This is important both for the culture and for the faith. For, "the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out".[ii]

In this issue of our *Bulletin Of Ecumenical Theology* we address this question of inculturation. The lead article by Francis Njoku focuses on the models used by African theologians in their search for ways of making the faith become culture. The models Njoku examined include the ancestral model, the staurological, proverbial , and hospitality models. Njoku prefers to work with a new model, the covenant model, because it leads to a happy bonding of African cultures and the Christian gospel. It will further link intimately the interests of ecology and theology. For, among Africans a covenant with humans implicates a pact with the earth.

Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh demonstrates, in his contribution, the layers of culture in the study and interpretation of Scripture. Concentrating on the ritual of throwing dust on one's head in times of distress, especially at the presence of death, he shows that there has been change and development in the understanding of this particular rite Initially it symbolised anger and denial or avoidance of the feared evil. Later, especially in the Christian practice, it symbolised the acceptance of the reality of death through which one passes to eternal life.

In his own contribution to this issue, Anthony Ekwunife focuses on the place of culture in the formation of candidates to the catholic priesthood. Limiting his survey to seminaries in Nigeria, during the colonial and post-colonial times, Ekwunife discovers that there is little relevance of the cultural context in the training of the future leaders of the catholic church. Cultural values, he insists, are imperative in seminary formation if these men are to become the directors of inculturation in the Church.

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[i] See James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*. Vol. One Theology and Ethics, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 4.

[ii] Letter of John Paul II to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli on the occasion of the creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, May 20 1982, in L'Osservatore Romano June 28 1982, pp. 1-8.